

Caac language

Caac or **Caaàc**, **Caawac**, **Moenebeng**, **Mwelebeng** is a Kanak language of northern New Caledonia. As of 2009, there were 1,170 reported speakers of Caac.^[3] The primary Caac-speaking population center is the village of Pouebo (or *Pweevo* in Caac), which is located on the northeastern coast of Grande Terre in the region of Hoot ma Waap. Caac is classified as an Extreme Northern New Caledonian language. Its closest linguistic relatives are also its closest geographic relatives which include Nêlêmwa-Nixumwak, Yuanga (also Yuaga) and Nyâlayu.

While most of the Caac-speaking people live in Hoot ma Waap, it is estimated that approximately 33% of the population live in the Noumea region, largely in the Paita-Mont Dore area of the capital. The first Caac speakers arrived in Noumea in the 1850s when Marist missionaries forced 120 people from Pouebo and Balade to accompany them to La Conception, the local designation for Paita-Mont Dore. This long historical separation between the groups has resulted in two Caac varieties. Differences have largely arisen in the phonology because of the southern variety's contact with the languages of southern New Caledonia, which have distinct phonological inventories from that in the north.^[4]

Reports tend to agree that Caac is threatened or vulnerable.^[5] Caac is largely only used with family and in social and customary contexts. Caac speakers are almost entirely multilingual minimally in Caac and French, though many also speak one or more of the neighboring languages. French plays a particularly heightened role in the lives of the Kanak people. It is the only official language of New Caledonia, despite the presence of 28 Kanak languages, and it is the language of media, government, public services, and education. As of 1998, the Kanak languages have been recognized as "languages of culture and education" by the Noumea Accords. As a result, today, many Kanak languages are taught in schools, and their use in media is growing. Caac is no longer taught in schools, but in the 1980s and 90s it was taught in an alternative school that was organized by Caac speakers. More recently it was taught in a private secondary school. Despite efforts to incorporate Kanak languages into the curriculum, French remains paramount. As such, many speakers of Kanak languages, including Caac, are prioritizing French for their children so that they may be able to obtain an education and a good job. Because of this, young speakers have only a passive knowledge of Caac.^[6]

Phonology

Caac	
Moenebeng	
<i>caaàc</i>	
Pronunciation	[caːac]
Native to	Pouébo, New Caledonia
Native speakers	1,200 (2009 census) ^[1]
Language family	Austronesian <ul style="list-style-type: none">Malayo-Polynesian<ul style="list-style-type: none">Oceanic<ul style="list-style-type: none">Southern Oceanic<ul style="list-style-type: none">New Caledonian – Loyalties<ul style="list-style-type: none">New Caledonian<ul style="list-style-type: none">Northern New Caledonian<ul style="list-style-type: none">Extreme Northern<ul style="list-style-type: none">Caac
Language codes	
ISO 639-3	msq
Glottolog	caac1237 (http://glottolog.org/resource/languoid/id/caac1237) ^[2]

Caac has 27 consonant phonemes. Stops may be plain voiceless, aspirated, or prenasalized.^[6] The table contains both the IPA notation and the graphemes that correspond to the Caac orthography promoted by the Association Vaalija in Pouebo.

Caac Consonants

	Labio-velar	Bilabial	Alveolar	Palatal	Velar	Glottal
Non-aspirated Stop	p ^w <pw>	p	t	c	k	
Aspirated Stop		p ^h <ph>	t ^h	c ^h <ch>	k ^h <kh>	
Nasal	m ^w <mw>	m	n	ɲ <ny>	ŋ <ng>	
Prenasal	ᵐb ^w <bw>	ᵐb	ⁿd <d>	ɲj <j>	ⁿg <g>	
Trill			r			
Fricative	w	β <v>	ð <z>	j <y>	ɣ <x>	h
Lateral approximant			l			

Caac has a series of five vowels that contrast based on nasalization and length. Nasalized vowels occur more-rarely than oral vowels. Oral vowels phonetically nasalize in one of two instances: 1) when preceded by a labio-velar consonant and 2) when followed by a nasal or prenasal consonant. There are also two central oral vowels that are restricted in their occurrence.^[6]

Caac Oral Vowels

	Front	Central	Back
Closed	i	(ɨ)<ü>	u
Mid	e	(ø)<ö>	o
Open	a		

Caac Nasal Vowels

	Front	Central	Back
Closed	ĩ <î>		ũ <û>
Mid	ẽ <ê>		õ <ô>
Open	ã <â>		

Grammar

Basic word order in Caac is VOS. However, when the subject is pronominal, it also occurs preverbally sVO.

sVo Word order

	Front	Central	Back	
No	na=da	le	thiin	cele-n
1SG.S	give=upward	DEF	letter	at/to-3SG.POLL
'I send a letter to her windwards (in Noumea).'				

Like is common among Oceanic languages, Caac distinguishes three persons and three degrees of plurality. It additionally distinguishes inclusive and exclusive first person dual and plural forms.^[6]

	Singular	Dual inc/exc	Plural inc/exc
1	<i>no</i>	<i>nyi/zi</i>	<i>nya/za</i>
2	<i>zo</i>	<i>zi</i>	<i>re</i>
3	<i>i</i>	<i>za</i>	<i>ra</i>

References

1. Caac (<https://www.ethnologue.com/18/language/msq/>) at *Ethnologue* (18th ed., 2015)
2. Hammarström, Harald; Forkel, Robert; Haspelmath, Martin, eds. (2017). "Caac" (<http://glottolog.org/resource/languoid/id/caac1237>). *Glottolog 3.0*. Jena, Germany: Max Planck Institute for the Science of Human History.
3. Eberhard, David M. "Caac" (<http://www.ethnologue.com>). *Ethnologue: Languages of the World. Twenty second edition*.
4. Hollyman, Jim (1999). *Études sur les langues du Nord de la Nouvelle-Calédonie*. Paris: Peeters Publishers.
5. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. "Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger" (<http://www.unesco.org/culture/languages-atlas/>).
6. Cauchard, Aurélie (2018). *Spatial Expression in Caac: An Oceanic Language Spoken in the North of New Caledonia*. Boston: De Gruyter Mouton.

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